

The Prince of Wales has hailed the potential of the Commonwealth to make a difference ahead of a summit in Africa for leaders from the family of nations.

Charles will represent the Queen, head of the Commonwealth when prime ministers and presidents gather in Rwanda for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) later this month.

The future king, who will be joined by the Duchess of Cornwall, will spend his first-day meeting survivors and perpetrators of the Rwandan genocide.

He said: "My wife and I look forward to meeting Commonwealth leaders and, for the first time, being able to visit Rwanda.

"Over the years, I have learned a great deal from the ideas, concerns, and aspirations which people across the Commonwealth have so generously shared.

"I have been struck, time and again, by how many common threads there are between us.

"Too many members of the Commonwealth are amongst the world's most climate-vulnerable countries.

"As two out of three Commonwealth citizens are under the age of 30 there is a pressing need to find opportunities for our young people.

"Taking shared responsibility to solve problems like these means the Commonwealth has the potential to make a profound difference in the lives of its citizens - and, in so doing, to be an unparalleled force for good in our world."

In 1994 hundreds of thousands of members of the Tutsi community were slaughtered in Rwanda by ethnic Hutu extremists. The issue of genocide and reconciliation is said to be very close to the prince's heart and he will visit a village that was targeted.

Chris Fitzgerald, deputy private secretary to the prince for foreign, Commonwealth, and development affairs, said: "At the invitation of the government of Rwanda, their royal highnesses will also undertake a bilateral visit to Rwanda.

"This will be the first royal visit to Rwanda, one of a minority of the world's nations not yet visited by Her Majesty the Queen.

“Their royal highnesses’ visit will provide an opportunity to learn more about the journey Rwanda has been on to reflect, rebuild and advance following the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi.

“They will begin by visiting Rwanda’s National Genocide Memorial and museum, where they will lay a wreath followed by meeting and listening to survivors.

“Later that day, his royal highness will travel to a memorial site and reconciliation village where he will meet perpetrators and survivors who live side by side, to listen to their experience of the genocide and the difficult process of reconciliation.”

Charles has been encouraged by former Rwandan footballer Eric Murangwa to visit a church outside the Rwandan capital where the remains of tens of thousands of genocide victims are buried.

Mr Murangwa was sheltered from the killings by teammates, and Charles made him an MBE in recognition of his efforts raising awareness of the genocide against the Tutsi. He is the founder of the organisation Football for Hope, Peace and Unity.

In April, Mr Murangwa was invited to watch as the prince planted a tree at Dumfries House in commemoration of the genocide victims.

CHOGM will take place in Kigali during the week of June 20, following its postponement in 2020 and 2021 due to the Covid-19 crisis.

The event, which is usually held in a different country every two years, brings together leaders from the 54 Commonwealth nations.

The article was written by Tony Jones and was first published by msn news